



ANTHRAX

Anthrax is an acute infectious disease caused by the spore-forming bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*. Anthrax most commonly occurs in hoofed mammals but also can infect humans.

Symptoms

Symptoms of disease vary depending upon how the disease was contracted but usually occur within seven days after exposure. The serious forms of human anthrax are inhalation anthrax, cutaneous anthrax and intestinal anthrax.

Infection

Illness from intestinal anthrax may follow the consumption of contaminated food and is characterized by an acute inflammation of the intestinal tract. Initial signs of nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting and fever are followed by abdominal pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea.

Initial symptoms of inhalation anthrax infection may resemble a common cold. After several days, the symptoms may progress to severe breathing problems and shock. Inhalation anthrax is often fatal.

Direct person-to-person spread of anthrax is extremely unlikely, if it occurs at all. Therefore, there is no need to immunize or treat contacts of people who are ill with anthrax – such as household contacts, friends or coworkers – unless they also were exposed to the same source of infection.

Treatment

For people exposed to anthrax, infection can be prevented with antibiotic treatment. Early antibiotic treatment of anthrax is essential – delay lessens chances for survival. Anthrax usually is susceptible to penicillin, doxycycline and fluoroquinolones.

Vaccination/Prophylaxis

An anthrax vaccine also can prevent infection. Anthrax vaccination is not recommended for the general public and is not available.

For more information, call the North Dakota Department of Health at 701.328.2378.